DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 154 347 CS 004 067

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TITLE Views on Reading and Language: A Comparison of the Opinions of University Reading Faculty, Classroom Teachers and Parents.
PUB DATE Mar 78
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Asscciation (Toronto, Canada, March 27-31, 1978); Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Child Language; Comparative Analysis; *Differences; Elementary Education; *Language Attitudes; Language Development; *Parent Attitudes; Reading Achievement; *Reading Instruction; Surveys; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Educators

ABSTRACT

Three groups (41 university reading faculty members, 34 classroom teachers, and 128 parents) provided data about their attitudes toward the relationship between language and reading, the reading process, and reading instruction. The results suggest that the three groups have different concepts of teaching and learning. For example, in the responses about reading instruction, the reading faculty expressed a unified view that focused on the importance of comprehension and on strategies for obtaining meaning from written material, with little emphasis on correcting individual word errors. Classroom teachers were divided on these issues, while parents strongly supported the position that correcting mistakes is important in reading and language instruction. Differences were not so marked in groups' attitudes toward the importance of language facility for school success, although the same trends were apparent. The implication developed from the study is that as children move from classroom to classroom or from school to home, they may experience a variety of linguistic demands or expectations about appropriate reading and language behavior. (RL)

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Views on Reading and Language:

A Comparison of the Opinions of

University Reading Faculty, Classroom Teachers and Parents

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The Catholic University of America

Washington, D. C., 20064

Running head: Views on Reading and Language

Paper presented at AERA, Toronto, Canada, 1978

Printed in U. S. A.

CS004067

Introduction

There is general agreement among educators that reading and language are crucial factors in a child's education. But there is probably no general agreement among university faculty members who teach reading, primary school teachers and parents on precisely how reading and language are related. What are faculty members who teach reading, primary school teachers', and parents' opinions about reading and reading instruction? How important do these groups think language is for school success? These questions motivated the study we are reporting today.

University faculty views of reading instruction are likely to be influenced by theories which describe or explain the reading process. The task of university reading faculty is to analyze and present theories of reading to teachers and researchers. The university's impact on reading programs, then, can be seen in the extent to which teachers reflect professor's views of the reading process, and in the practical application of the theories. While not everyone agrees on the best way to teach reading, several current theories stress that reading be viewed as the ability to extract meaning from printed words or to bring meaning to them. In either case, the focus is on reading comprehension and on the importance of language ability as a basis for reading ability. Children are encouraged to draw on their understanding of the structure and form of language as well as the graphic symbols to interpret meaning for words they do not know. The practical goal of this approach, therefore, is to produce readers who understand what they read but do not necessarily recognize every word. We predicted that faculty opinions about reading

instruction would be guided by: 1) principles they subscribe to from current reading theory, and 2) the belief that language is important for school success. We further predicted that they would hold these two opinions as a group.

Teacher's views of reading instruction are probably influenced by: 1) knowledge of reading theories acquired through reading courses taken at the university level, 2) daily contact with children who differ greatly in both reading ability and response to instruction, and 3) to a lesser extent, contact with parents who are concerned about their child's reading progress. The teacher's task is to teach children of various reading abilities to read with understanding. We predict that both the conflicting sources of influence as well as the teacher's task of teaching children to read would result in less agreement among teachers on views toward reading instruction. No prediction was made for attitudes toward language and school success.

Parents' views of how reading should be taught are likely to be a product of how they were taught to read; possibly university reading courses; and particularly, by expectations that they have for their children to read. The parents' task is to be sure that their child has learned to read fluently and with understanding. They may feel that the most obvious way to reach this goal is to correct children's reading errors. We hypothesized that parents would reflect an attitude about reading instruction which emphasized correcting children's oral reading

and grammatical errors. We also believed that they would be unified as a group in expressing these views. No predictions were made about parents' views toward language as being important for general school success.

A questionnaire was constructed to identify and measure attitudes about the relationship between language and reading, the reading process and reading instruction. Seventy-seven items were generated to reflect current theoretical viewpoints and covered four categories:

1. The language base for reading - items reflecting experiences with language that are related to reading success. (Playground language activities like jumprope jingles help build a readiness for reading.)

2. Reading acquisition - items reflecting attitudes about how children come to acquire the ability to read (Children can learn to read without instruction.)

3. Reading instruction - items reflecting attitudes about how reading should be taught (The first thing children have to learn in order to read is the sounds represented by letters.)

4. Language - items dealing with language skills and processes that underlie general language comprehension (In order to retell a story, children must understand every word.)

Items from these categories were randomly ordered. Subjects were asked to respond to a five point Likert type scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Population

The study involved three groups, forty-one university faculty who taught courses in reading, thirty-four teachers and one hundred twenty-eight

parents. The university faculty sample was composed of full and part-time members of the faculty at colleges or universities in the Washington metropolitan area. The parent sample and ten of the teacher respondents were obtained from two private middle-class schools in Washington, D. C. In the two schools, the principals were contacted and they, in turn, solicited volunteers from the teachers and the parents of kindergarten, first and second grade children. The remaining teacher respondents were volunteer graduate students from two universities in the Washington, D. C., area who were currently teaching or had taught within the last two years either kindergarten, first or second grade.

Results

Factor analysis was used to detect underlying relationships among items. Principle components analysis with varimax rotation was used in the analysis. A cutpoint of a .40 loading with the factor was used to include an item in a factor. Twenty factors were extracted. Two of these factors contained sufficient numbers of items to be interpretable. Factor 1, consisting of 21 items dealing with the reading process, accounted for most of the variance being measured by the instrument (47%). Factor 2, dealing with the role of language and experiences with language that foster success in school, accounted for only 6% of the variance and contained 12 items.

Factor 1 dealt with the reading process, the importance of correctness vs. comprehension in both reading and language, and the controlling role

of the teacher. Typical items in this scale included:

- A teacher should not move a child on to the next book unless he can read out loud fluently.
- If a first grader reads a word inccrrectly, it is important that the teacher correct him.
- Phonic skills have to be taught; children cannot learn them by simply reading.

Factor 2 dealt with the relationship of language skills to school learning and experiences that foster reading and language ability. Items in this scale included:

- Success in school is tied to good language skills.
- Mothers who read a lot to their children help them get ready to read.

Results of analysis of variance procedures on the two factors revealed a significant difference in group responses. Results are displayed in Tables 1 and 2. The F statistic for factor 1 (2, 230 d. f.) was 100.547, $p<.000$. For factor 2, the F statistic was 7.265 with 2 and 230 d. f., $p<.001$.

Results of the Scheffé post hoc analysis indicated that the three groups differed significantly from each other on the items that comprised factor 1 and these differences were highly significant ($p<.01$). On factor 2, significant differences existed only between university faculty and parents, $p<.05$.

Item inspection of factor 1 indicates that parents, as a group, are more likely to hold opinions that reflect the importance of correctness and of teacher control in reading and language than teachers of university faculty. Parent responses indicate that teachers should correct mistakes in oral reading (88.6% agree) while only 19.5% of the university faculty did. The classroom teachers fell in between with 61.7% agreement.

An assumption underlying the language experience approach is that a child's language should be recorded in print exactly as it is produced. Yet 52.9% of the classroom teachers felt that a child's language should be corrected before it is recorded by the teacher, 65% of the parents agree, while only 7% of the professors agree.

Focus on correctness is also evident in opinions about necessary skills for learning to read. For example, 87.8% of the university faculty disagreed with the statement: "The first thing children have to learn in order to read is the sounds of letters"; 77.2% of the parents agree with this statement. Only 35.3% of the teachers agreed.

Many theorists feel that learning to read can be as natural as learning to talk. The results of our research indicate, however, that parents (14%) feel children cannot learn to read without instruction. University faculty (80.5%), on the other hand, feel children can learn to read without instruction, and 64.7% of the classroom teachers express this feeling. Similarly, 84.2% of parents feel phonic skills have to be taught; children cannot learn them simply by reading.

Items in factor 2 reflect opinions about the importance of language for school success. More specifically, the items dealt with 1) the role language plays in learning to read, and 2) experiences with written language that lay the foundation for reading success.

An implication from current reading theories is that children bring their knowledge of language to the learning-to-read task. University faculty and teachers agreed with this approach. For example, 92.7% of the university faculty and 85.3% of the teachers agreed with the statement: "Words children use in their own speech are easier to read in print than words they do not use", while only 55.7% of the parents agreed. Again, 92.7% of university professors agree that new words should be introduced in the context of a sentence rather than in isolation. A majority of the teachers (79.4%) agreed with this statement, but only 58.3% of the parents felt this way.

There were also differences in opinions about the importance of prior experiences with oral and written language for success in reading. While all groups agreed that children should be introduced to books prior to developing reading skills, there was less agreement on the importance of experience with written material prior to school. University faculty (85.3%) view these experiences as important. Teachers tended to put less importance in these prior experiences; that is, only 47.1% felt they made an important contribution to reading progress. Parents put a little more faith in these experiences; 61.4% agreed with the statement.

Some of the items on the scale focused on the role of language in learning and success in school. On these items, there was strong agreement among the three groups that language does facilitate learning in young children. For university faculty, teachers and parents, the percentages were 92.6, 97, and 83% respectively. Similar strong agreement was evident for the idea that success in school is tied to good language skills. While there were group differences on this factor, they were not as striking as they were on factor 1.

Discussion

This paper is an attempt to answer two questions: 1) What are university reading faculty, primary school teachers', and parents' opinions about reading and reading instruction?, 2) How important do these groups think language is for school success? These questions are important because what is at stake is people's beliefs about appropriate techniques for fostering reading and language in classrooms. The research reported here suggests that university faculty, teachers and parents have different concepts of teaching and learning.

When questioned about reading instruction, the three groups differed greatly. The university reading faculty expressed a unified view, which is in agreement with current reading research. This view focuses on the importance of comprehension, strategies for obtaining meaning from written material and little emphasis on correcting individual word errors. In addition, this view credits readers as active learners who can acquire

strategies necessary for mastering the reading process on their own. Teachers were divided on these contentions. Parents, as a group, strongly supported the position that correcting mistakes is important in reading and language instruction.

Differences in attitudes among groups regarding the importance of language facility for school success were not so marked, although the same trends were apparent. Language questions were more general and easier to agree with. Consequently, attitudes expressed about language were, perhaps a function of the specificity of the questions. The answers indicate, however, that although most people agree language facility is an important component of school success, this agreement does not imply that language comprehension should receive primary emphasis during reading instruction.

Apart from these differences in opinion, the implication derived from this study is that as children move from one classroom to another, or from school to home, they may be experiencing a variety of linguistic demands. For example, as children interact with the spoken language of teachers and parents, and with the written language of books, it is quite possible that they are subject to different expectations concerning appropriate reading and language behavior. Instructional breakdown, perhaps, often occurs between classrooms and between schools and homes.

The analysis of university faculty, teachers' and parents' opinions of reading, instruction and language yields a number of divisions. We

have yet to analyze the three groups by the number of university reading and language courses each has taken. We intend to more accurately determine to what extent: 1) judgments about reading instruction are a function of exposure to theories of reading; 2) the inherent differences in perspective which each group has are based on their different tasks (university faculty, primary school teacher or parent).

One topic for investigation will point to an influence on parent attitudes which this paper has not dealt with, largely because the sample includes only two schools. Of necessity, the following question needs to be answered: Do schools which involve parents in reading programs produce parents and teachers who have similiar attitudes about reading and language than do schools who do not involve parents in their reading programs?

Table 1

Summary of Analysis of Variance for Factor 1

Source	df	Mean Square	F	Probability
Group	2	11756.858	100.547	.0001
Error	230	116.929		
Total	232	217.273		

Table 2

Summary of Analysis of Variance for Factor 2

Source	df	Mean Square	F	Probability
Group	2	313.062	7.265	.001
Error	230	43.093		
Total	232	45.420		

Table 3

Test on Differences Between Pairs of Means for Factor 1

Group	Means and Standard Deviations	University	Teachers	Parents
University	$\bar{x}$ = 45.0976 sd = 8.5112		-14.2553*	-19.8209*
Teachers	$\bar{x}$ = 59.3529 sd = 10.3012			-5.5656*
Parents	$\bar{x}$ = 64.9185 sd = 11.4253			

* $p < .01$

Table 4

Test on Differences Between Pairs of Means for Factor 2

Group	Means and Standard Deviations	University	Teachers	Parents
University	$\bar{x}$ = 44.8046 sd = 4.3429		2.187	4.2413*
Teachers	$\bar{x}$ = 42.6176 sd = 8.3667			2.0543
Parents	$\bar{x}$ = 40.5633 sd = 6.6038			

* $p < .05$